

[r]

11

# THE DOCTRINE

OF THE

## Blessed Trinity

Briefly Explained,

In a Letter to a Friend.

**T**HE Doctrine of the *Arians*, *Socinians*,  
or *Anti-Trinitarians*, (call them as you  
please, provided you call them not  
*Orthodox Christians*) in opposition to those who  
believe (according to the Word of God), That  
the Sacred Trinity, of Father, Son, and Holy-  
Ghost, are so distinguished each from other,  
that the Father is not the Son, or Holy-Ghost;  
the Son not the Father, or Holy-Ghost; the  
Holy-Ghost not the Father, or Son; yet so Uni-

A 2

ted,

[21]

ted, as that they are all *One God*; (which, in the *Athanasian Creed*, is called *Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity*; or, in common speaking, *Three Persons and One God*) is what you were lately discoursing with me, and of which I shall give you some of my present Thoughts.

The Scripture tells us plainly, *There are Three that bear record in Heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy-Ghost: and these Three are One*, 1 Joh. 5. 7. And the Form of Baptism (Matt. 28. 19.) is, *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy-Ghost*.

And the Christian Church, from the time of Christ and his Apostles downwards hitherto, as well before as since the Council of Nice, have ever held the Divinity of those *Three Persons* (as they are commonly called;) and that these *Three* are but *One God*. And, that they have so held, hath been, by divers, sufficiently proved from the most ancient christian Writers, which are now extant. Which, therefore, I take for granted, as sufficiently proved by others, without spending time, at present, to prove it a-new.

That

That these are *Three*, distinguished each from other, is manifest. And, that this Distinction amongst themselves, is wont to be called *Personality*. By which word, we mean, that Distinction (what ever it be) whereby they are distinguished each from other, and thence called *Three Persons*.

If the word *Person* do not please, we need not be fond of Words, so the Thing be agreed. Yet is it a good Word, and warranted by Scripture, *John 1. 3.* where the Son is called, *the express Image of his Fathers Person*. For so we render the Word *Hypostasis*, which is there used; and mean by it, what I think to be there meant. And we have no reason to wave the Word, since we know no better to put in the Place of it.

If it be asked, what these *Personalities* or *Characteristicks* are, whereby each Person is distinguished from other, I think we have little more thereof in Scripture, than that the *Father* is said to *Beget*; the *Son*, to be *Begotten*; and the *Holy Ghost*, to *Proceed*.

If it be further asked, what is the full import of these Words (which are but Metaphorical), and what is the adequate Meaning

of them ) I think we need not trouble our  
 selves about it : For, since it is a matter purely  
 of Revelation (not of natural Knowledge,)  
 and we know no more of it than what is reveal-  
 ed in Scripture, where the Scripture is silent,  
 we may be content to be ignorant. And we  
 who know so little of the Essence of any thing,  
 especially of Spiritual Beings, though finite,  
 need not think it strange that we are not able  
 to comprehend all the Particularities of what  
 concerns that of God, and the Blessed Trinity.  
 I know that the Fathers, and School-men,  
 and some after them, have employed their  
 Wits to find out some faint Resemblances from  
 natural things, whereby to express their most  
 perfect Conceptions of the *Sancti* Trinity. But  
 they do not pretend to give an adequate Ac-  
 count of it, but only some conjectural Hypo-  
 theses, rather of what May be, than of what cer-  
 tainly Is. Nor need we be concerned, to be  
 curiously inquisitive into it, beyond what God  
 hath been pleased to reveal concerning it.

That the Three Persons are distinguished, is  
 evident; (though we do not perfectly un-  
 derstand what those Distinctions are.) That to  
 each of these, the Scripture ascribes Divinity,



is abundantly shewed by those who have written on this Subject. That there is but *One God*, is agreed on all hands: That the Father is said to *Beget*; the Son, to be *Begotten*; and the Holy Ghost, to *Proceed*; is agreed also; though we do not perfectly understand the full Import of these Words.

And here we might quietly acquiesce (without troubling our selves further,) did not the clamorous *Socinians* importunately suggest the *Impossibility* and *Inconsistence* of these things, inasmuch as to tell us, That, how clear so ever the Expressions of Scripture be, or can be, to this purpose, they will not believe it, as being inconsistent with natural Reason. And therefore, though they do not yet think fit to give us a bare-fac'd Rejection of Scripture; yet they do (and must, they tell us,) put such a forced Sense on the words of it (be they never so plain) as to make them signify somewhat else.

There is, therefore, in this Doctrine of the *Trinity*, as in that of the *Resurrection from the Dead*, a double Inquiry. First, whether it be *Possible*; and then, whether it be *True*. And these to be argued (in both Cases) from a very different

different Topick: The one from Natural Reason; the other from Revelation. Yet so, that this latter doth certainly conclude the former, if rightly understood. And though we should not be able to solve all Difficulties, yet must we believe the thing, if revealed, unless we will deny the Authority of such Revelation.

Thus our Saviour, against the Sadducees, who denied the Resurrection, *Matth. 22. 29.* *Ye erre (saith he) not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of God.* The Power of God, if rightly understood, was enough (from the Light of Reason) to prove it not impossible: But, whether or no it will be so (which natural Reason could not determine,) was to be argued from Scripture Revelation.

In like manner, St. Paul before Agrippa, *Act. 26.* first argues the Possibility of it. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the Dead?* ver. 8. For if Agrippa did believe the Creation of the World, (as many even of the Heathen did, from the light of Nature,) he could not think it Impossible for that God (who had at first made all things of nothing) to recollect out of its Dust or Ashes,

Ashes, a Body which once had been. But  
 whether or no he would do so, depended upon  
 another Question, to be after asked, ver. 27.  
*King Agrippa, believest thou the Prophets?* For this  
 was purely matter of Revelation, and could  
 not otherwise be known: For, as to the *Im-*  
*mortality of the Soul*, and a future state hereafter,  
 many of the Heathens went very far, by  
 the Light of Nature; but as to the *Resurrection*  
*of the Body*, I do not find they had any Senti-  
 ments about it (or but very faint, if any :)  
 And if they had, it may well be supposed to  
 be the remainder of some ancient Tradition  
 from the Jews, or their Predecessors. Nor do  
 I see any foundation in Nature, which should  
 make them think of it (before it was revealed)  
 any more, than of the Redemption of Man-  
 kind by Christ, (which we should never have  
 thought of, had not God himself contrived and  
 declared it to us.) But, when that of the Resur-  
 rection was once suggested, there was no pre-  
 tence of Reason to think it a thing *Impossible*,  
 and therefore no reason to doubt the *Truth* of  
 it, when Declared, if we believe the Scri-  
 ptures, wherein it is revealed; especially those  
 of the New Testament.

B

It

It is much the same as to the Doctrine of the *Trinity*. It is a thing we should not have thought of, if it had not been suggested by Divine Writers; but, when suggested, there is nothing in natural Reason (that we know of, or can know of) why it should be thought *Impossible*; but whether or no it be so, depends only upon Revelation.

And in this case the Revelation seems so clear (to those who believe the Scriptures) that we have no reason to doubt of it, unless the thing be found to be really *Impossible*, and inconsistent with Reason. Nor do the *Anti-Trinitarians* insist on any other ground why they deny it, save only, That it seems to them absolutely *Impossible*; and therefore think themselves bound to put another Sense on all Places of Scripture (how clear soever they be, or can be) which prove or favour it.

So that the Controversie is now reduced to this single Point, Whether it be *Possible* or not *Possible*: Whether it be consistent or inconsistent with Natural Light or Reason. (And to that point therefore I shall confine my Discourse.) For it seems agreed on all hands (as to those who believe the Scriptures) that, if

it be not *Impossible*, it is sufficiently revealed.

Now for us who understand so little of God's infinite Essence, and which it is impossible for us fully to comprehend, who are our selves but finite, and mostly conversant with material Objects ; in so much that we cannot pretend to understand the Essence of our own Souls ; and, when we attempt to explain it, must do it rather by saying what it is not, than what it is ; (so hard a matter is it for us to fix in our Mind or Fancy, a Notion, Idea, or Conception of a spiritual Being ; which falls not under our Senses :) 'Tis hard, I say, for us (who understand so little of a Spirit) to determine (of what God is pleased to reveal) that it is *Impossible*, or inconsistent with his Essence, which Essence we cannot understand.

But what is it that is thus pretended to be *Impossible* ? 'Tis but this, That there be Three *Somewhats*, which are but One God : (and these *Somewhats* we commonly call *Persons*.) Now what Inconsistence is there in all this ? That *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy-Ghost* are Three, is manifest ; and are in Scripture-Language distinguished. That there is but One God is manifest



also, and all these *Three* are this *God*: That the name *Person* is no incongruous Word, is evident from *Heb. i. 3.* where it is used. If it be said, It doth not agree to them exactly in the same Sence in which it is commonly used amongst men; we say so too, nor doth any Word, when applyed to God, signifie just the same as when applyed to men, but only somewhat analogous thereunto.

What kind or degree of Distinction (according to our Metaphysicks) this is, we need not be very solicitous to enquire; or, whether in our Metaphysicks (accommodated to our Notions of Finite Beings) there be any Name for it: 'Tis enough for us if these *Three* may truly be so distinguished, as that one be not the other, and yet all but *One God*.

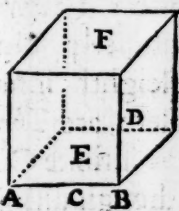
Now, that there is no *Inconsistence* or *Impossibility*, that, what in one regard are *Three*, may in another regard be *One*, is very manifest from many Instances that may be given even in Finite Beings, such as we converse with; which, though they do not adequately agree with this of the *Sacred Trinity*, (nor is it to be expected that they should; Finite, with what is Infinite;) yet there is enough in them to shew, there is no such *Inconsistence* as is pretended.

I shall

I shall spare to instance in many Resemblances which have been given long since by Fathers and Schoolmen, or by later Writers. Which, though they are not pretended to be adequately the same with that of the *Sacred Trinity*, (as neither will any thing else be that we can take from finite Beings;) yet are they sufficient to shew that there is no *Inconsistence* in it. (Which is all that is here incumbent on us to prove.) I shall only name a few.

I will begin with what concerns the most gross of Finite Beings, that is, Material Bodies.

Suppose we then a Cubical Body, (which what it is, every one knows, that knows a Dy.) In this are *Three Dimensions*, (Length, Breadth, and Height) and yet but *One Cube*. Its Length (suppose between East and West) *A. B.* Its Breadth (suppose between North and South) *C. D.* Its Height (between Bottom and Top) *E. F.* Here are *Three Local Dimensions*, truly Distinguished each from other, (not only imaginarily :) The distance between East and West (whether we think or think not  
of



of it) is not that between North and South ; nor be either of these that between Top and Bottom. The Length is not the Breadth, or Heighth ; the Breadth is not the Length, or Heighth ; and the Heighth is not the Length, or Breadth : But they are *Three* Divisions, truly distinct each from other : Yet are all these but *One* Cube : And if any one of the *Three* were wanting it were not a Cube. There is no Inconsistence therefore , that what in one regard, are *Three* (three Dimensions) may, in another regard, be so united as to be but *One*, (one Cube.) And if it may be so in Corporeals, much more in Spirituals.

Suppose we further, Each of these Dimensions infinitely continued ; the Length infinitely Eastward and Westward, the Breadth infinitely Northward and Southward , the Heighth infinitely Upward and Downward : Here are *Three* infinite Dimensions, and but *One* infinite Cube ; and these *Three* Dimensions (though distinct) are equal each to other (else it were not a Cube ; ) and though we should allow, that a Cube cannot be infinite (because a Body, and therefore a finite Creature :) Yet a Spirit may ; such as is the Infinite God. And therefore

therefore no Inconsistence ; that there be *Three* Personalities (each infinite, and all equal), and yet but *One* Infinite God , essentially the same with those *Three Persons*.

I add further , That such Infinite Cube, can therefore be but *One*, and those *Three* Dimensions can be but *Three*, (not more nor fewer :) For, if Infinite as to its Length (Eastward and Westward), and as to its Breadth (Northward and Southward), and as to its Height (Upward and Downward); it will take up all imaginary space possible, and leave no room either for more Cubes or more Dimensions: And if this infinite Cube were (and shall be) Eternally so, its Dimensions also must be Infinite and Co-eternal.

I say further, If in this (supposed) Cube, (we suppose in Order, not in Time) its first Dimension, that of Length, as *A. B.*, and to this Length be given an equal Breadth (which is the true generation of a Square) as *C. D.*, which compleats the square Basis of this Cube; and to this Basis (of Length and Breadth) be given (as by a further Procession from Both) an equal Height *E. F.*, which compleats the Cube; and all this eternally,  
(for

(for such is the Cube supposed to be,) here is a fair Resemblance (if we may *parvis componere magna*) of the *Father*, (as the Fountain or Original;) of the *Son*, (as generated of him from all Eternity;) and of the *Holy-Ghost*, (as eternally Proceeding from Both;) And all this without any Inconsistence. This *longum, latum, profundum*, (Long, Broad, and Tall,) is but One Cube; of Three Dimensions, and yet but One Body: And this *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy-Ghost*; Three Persons, and yet but One God. And as, there, the Dimensions are not (in the Abstract) predicated or affirmed each of other, or the Cube of either, (the Length is not the Breadth or Heighth, nor either of these a Cube;) but (in the Concrete) Cube is affirmed of all; this *longum, latum, profundum*, is a Cube, and the same Cube: So here, (in the Abstract) the Personality of the *Father* is not that of the *Son*, nor either of these that of the *Holy-Ghost*, nor the *Deity* or *Godhead* any of these; but (in the Concrete) though the Personalities are not, yet the Persons are, each of them *God* and the same *God*.

If it be objected, that those Concretes are Affirmed or Predicated each of other; (that  
*longum*



*longum* is also *latum* and *profundum*, (this *Long* is *Broad* and *Tall*; ) but not so here, the *Father* is not the *Son* or *Holy-Ghost* : I answer, That, if the words be rightly considered, the Analogy holds here also: For when we say, this *Long* is *Broad* and *Tall* (where *Cube* or *Body* is understood) the full meaning is plainly thus; This *Body*, which, as to one Dimension (that of *Length*), is said to be a *long* *Body*, is the same *Body*, which, as to another Dimension (that of *Breadth*), is said to be a *broad* *Body*, and which, as to a third Dimension (that of *Height*), is said to be a *tall* *Body*. So here, That *God*, which (as to one Personality) is *God the Father*, is the same *God*, which (as to another Personality) is *God the Son*, and which (as to a third Personality) is *God the Holy-Ghost*. So the Analogy holds every way, nor is there any Inconsistence in either Case.

I proceed to the Consideration of somewhat more Spiritual, and less Material than that of a *Body* locally extended.

Suppose we then a Created Angel, or Humane Soul: at least If those who deny the Blessed Trinity will allow that there are such Beings; but if they be Sadducees, who do not

acknowledge either Angels or Spirit, or that the Holy Scriptures are the word of God, which testify both, (which I doubt is the case of some of them) let them speak out, that so we may know whom we have to deal with, and not pretend to nibble only at the *Athanasian Creed*, or some Expressions therein, while the quarrel is indeed at somewhat higher (though, *ad amolendam invidiam*, they think fit to dissemble it,) and that they do but faintly believe (if at all) that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, or the Doctrines therein contained to be such. And we have reason to suspect it, when they spare not to let us know, that, were this Doctrine of the Trinity therein delivered in Words as express as could be, they would not believe it.

But suppose we, (what they would seem to grant, and what I am so charitable as to think divers of them do believe) That there are Spiritual Beings; such as Angels and the Souls of Men; and that these Spiritual Beings are endued with Knowledge (or Wisdom) and Force (or an executive Power) to act according to that Knowledge. That there is some such thing, at least in Man, (whether Body

or

or Soul) they cannot but acknowledge ; for themselves *be*, and *know*, and *do*. And though we cannot fully comprehend, much less express in Words, how all this is so ; (for we are here at a loss, as well as in higher things :) Yet, *that it is*, they cannot deny, though they do not know *How*.

Now, to *Be*, and to *Know*, and to *Do*, are certainly distinct each from other, (though perhaps we are not all agreed, of what kind, or in what degree this Distinction is :) *To be* is not the same as *to know*, for that may be were this is not ; and *to do* is (for the same reason) somewhat different from both those, for a Man may *Be* and may *Know* what he doth not *Do* ; yet tis one and the same Soul (at least one and the same Man) which *Is*, and *Knows*, and *Does*. There is therefore no Impossibility or Inconsistence in it, That what in one regard are *Three*, may in another regard be *One*. Thus in the Sacred Trinity, if we conceive of the *Father* as the Original or First Person, who *begets* the Son ; the *Son* as the Wisdom of the *Father*, *begotten* of Him ; and the *Holy Ghost* as the Spirit of the *Father* and the *Son*, as *proceeding* from Both, and yet the same God with both ; (or what other Distinction

distinction there may be of these *Three Persons*, who are but *One God*, that we do not know; there is no Inconsistence in it, that these *Three* may be *One*; *Three* in one regard, and *One* in another.

I might shew the same as to the *Understanding*, *Will*, and *Meaning*, which are all the same *Soul*: And the known Metaphysical Terms of *Unum*, *Verum*, *Bonum*, which are all but the same *Ens*. And many other Instances of like Nature.

But we hold (it will be said) a greater Distinction (than that of *Unum*, *Verum*, *Bonum*) between the *Three Persons* in the *Sacred Trinity*. Be it so. (But what that greater Distinction is, we do not pretend to comprehend.) However, it is from all these Instances evident, that there is no Impossibility, or Inconsistence with Reason, that what in one regard are *Three*, may in another Regard be *One*. Which is what we undertook to shew.

'Tis true, that not any, nor all of these Instances, nor any of those given by other Learned Men do adequately express the Distinction and Unity of the *Persons* in the *Sacred Trinity*, (for neither hath God distinctly declared it to us,

not

nor are we able fully to comprehend it, nor is it necessary for us to know.) But because we do not know *How the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child,* shall we therefore say they do not grow there? Or, because *We cannot by searching find out God, because we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection,* shall we therefore say, things cannot be, when God says they are, only because we know not *How*? If God say, *These Three are One*? shall we say, they are not? If God say, *The word was God, and, The word was made Flesh,* shall we say, Not so, only because we cannot tell *How*? It is safer to say It is, when God says It is, though we know not (in particular) How it is. Especially when there be so many Instances in Nature, to shew it not to be Impossible or Inconsistent with Reason. The thing is sufficiently revealed to those who are willing to be taught, and *receive the truth in the love of it.* (Nor is it denied, by those who gainsay it, but that, if the thing be possible, it is sufficiently revealed; there being no other Exception made, as to the Revelation, but the Impossibility of the



<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 11. 18.  
 Rom. 2. 8.  
<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. 6. 4.  
 Tit. 3. 9.  
<sup>a</sup> A.C. 28. 28.  
 Math. 23. 13.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Thes. 2. 10, 11.  
 Rom. 1. 24, 28.

<sup>b</sup> Phil. 2. 9.

And, while we be so, we be safe.

the thing.) <sup>1</sup> But if any man list to  
 be contentious, and to <sup>2</sup> quarrel about  
 words, it is no wonder if <sup>b</sup> hear-  
 ing they do hear and not understand,  
 and that God <sup>1</sup> give them over to be-  
 lieve a lie, who do not love the truth.  
 But <sup>k</sup> the humble be will teach his way.  
 Yours,

John Wallis.

August 17.  
 1690.

it denied, by those who gain it; but that  
 if the thing be possible, it is sufficiently re-  
 vealed; there being no other Exception made, as  
 to the Revelation, but the impossibility of  
 the thing in the first place.